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ADVENT:

IN FOUR LECTURES.

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IN FOUR LECTURES.

BY

THE REV. JOHN AYRE, M. A.

MINISTER OF ST. JOHN'S CHAPEL, DOWNSHIRE HILL, HAMPSTEAD, AND DOMESTIC CHAPLAIN TO THE RIGHT HON. THE EARL OF RODEN.

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PREFACE.

THIS little work does not claim attention on the score of novelty. Its merit, if it have any, consists in stating a broad truth in the plainest manner.

Perhaps on the subject here treated (as in most other things), men have run much into extremes. Either the future is altogether disregarded, or it is mapped out with the scrupulous minuteness of history. It has been the aim of the author to shew, that while, as has been well observed, the prophecies of Scripture were never intended to make *us* prophets, we might

gather from them the intimation, that an awful chapter in the history of the world is opening out,—a period approaching, in which the arm of the Lord will be remarkably revealed. This *general* truth he would insist on. Deprecating the thoughtlessness of many, as respects futurity, he would almost equally deprecate the rashness of those who curiously speculate on things unseen.

If this little book stir up any one, into whose hands it may fall, patiently to watch, and humbly to discern the signs of the times, the author will have abundant reason for gratitude to God.

Edmonton, April 10, 1835.

LECTURE I.

THE CERTAINTY OF CHRIST'S SECOND COMING.

2 PETER, i. 16.

We have not followed cunningly devised fables, when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but were eye-witnesses of his majesty.

IN the season of "advent" we are called on by the church to commemorate the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ "in great humility," and are instructed to look forward to his coming again "in glorious majesty." The past may be to us a pledge of the

future. If the apostles found the ancient prophecies not "cunningly devised fables," but literally and exactly accomplished when he came to redeem the world, we shall find them as surely based, and as minutely fulfilled, when he shall appear to judge the world. To that future coming our thoughts should frequently go forth. In it are concentrated our hopes and prospects. In it is the consummation of our faith. With it Christ himself consoled his personal followers: "I will come again, and receive you unto myself, that where I am, there ye may be also." We are therefore to watch for and welcome its approach; and as it travels onward, we are to lift up our heads, for our redemption then draweth nigh.

Beware, brethren, that ye be "not in darkness, that that day should overtake you as a thief:" therefore ye must "not sleep, as do others," but must "watch and be sober."

It is my intention to press this subject upon you, this advent, as strongly as I can: and I shall, with the divine permission, devote to it the four Sunday mornings. To-day, I shall confine myself to the certainty of Christ's second coming, as proved by his first. I shall, next week, speak of the suddenness, as we are warned in scripture, of Christ's coming: the Sunday after, I shall urge on you the necessity of watchfulness for Christ's coming: and on the fourth Sunday, I shall make a particular address,

enforcing upon my auditors the solemn, the paramount importance of present preparation for Christ's coming.

It is my earnest prayer that what I am enabled to say may be rendered abidingly useful to you: and I entreat you, for your part, to ask that Holy Spirit who alone can render the preached word effectual, and make you wise unto salvation.

To-day, then, I invite your attention to the certainty of Christ's second coming, as proved by the first: and I shall

I. Make some observations on the remarkable accomplishment of prophecy in his first coming: and,

II. Direct you to some of the predictions which inform us that he will come again.

I. To the first point. The prophecies, though misinterpreted by many of the Jews, did nevertheless very accurately describe the circumstances of Christ's life and sufferings and death. "We have not," says the apostle, "followed cunningly devised fables." It is true that had our Lord appeared with the magnificence and grandeur which befitted his character as "God over all," there never could have been a doubt of his being really the Messiah. And this sort of attestation to his mission *might* certainly have been afforded. He might have come down from heaven, having great power, so that the earth should have been "lightened with his glory." He might have appeared, as he hereafter

will appear, with ten thousands of his saints, and have gathered all nations before his throne. But this splendour would not have suited the errand on which he visited us. Nor would it have agreed with God's wise general course of government, who is used to give us not physical but moral demonstration of the truth of his word. Here was the difficulty and stumbling-block of the Jews. They had the example of Sinai before them, and considered not that that revelation, as being prior to written prophecy, required more manifestly "a sign *from heaven*." They remembered the lightnings and thunders, and voices, and thick darkness before which their fathers trembled, and they expected

that the Messiah, of whom their scriptures told, would be decked with at least the same external majesty. They were confirmed in this expectation, both by the phraseology of the scriptures, which must necessarily employ words descriptive of things visible to convey the idea of things invisible to our carnal understandings, and also by the fact, that, at some period or other, the Messiah shall literally assume, in the sight of all men, the power and dignity which belong to him. The Jews confounded his two advents. They were unable to discern "the times and the seasons," and could not suppose that one essentially so great would ever appear inferior. It was therefore of importance to

shew them, and indeed to shew the world, that the scripture did truly predict the low and mean estate in which Christ appeared; that they described his passion as well as his pre-eminence, and spoke of his death as well as of his eternal life. Let it be plain that the most remarkable events in the remarkable history of Christ were long before known and revealed; and no man of common earnestness and honesty of purpose could hesitate, even though he looked on him "crucified through weakness," in acknowledging "truly this was the Son of God."

It is not my intention here to enumerate *all* the facts related concerning Christ, in the books of the ancient seers: I shall

refer to them only so far as may give me ground on which to build my argument, that all things written in the law and the prophets, yet unfulfilled respecting him, will certainly and exactly come to pass. He who has been faithful heretofore will be faithful still. "Heaven and earth shall pass away," but his "word shall not pass away." It is joy to have a friend, a Saviour, on whom we can rely, who has been tried and proved and found faithful. We may then approach his throne with holy confidence; and be sure that he will not fail us at our need. Here is the value of fulfilled prophecy to the believer: he learns by experience that Christ is "the same yesterday, and to-day, and for ever."

I will now adduce a few passages from the Old Testament, in which some of the most remarkable circumstances of Messiah's first advent are foretold. The time of his appearance was fixed: "From the going forth of the commandment to restore Jerusalem unto the Messiah the Prince, shall be seven weeks, and threescore and two weeks.... and after threescore and two weeks shall Messiah be cut off, but not for himself*." A prophet, in the spirit and power of Elias, was to prepare his way: "Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet ... and he shall turn the heart of the fathers to the children, and the children to their fathers†." He was to be miraculously

* Dan. ix. 25, 26,

† Mal. iv. 5, 6, and iii. 1, compared with Luke, i. 17.

conceived: "Behold, a virgin shall conceive, and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel*." His birth-place was to be Bethlehem: "Thou, Bethlehem Ephratah, though thou be little among the thousands of Judah, yet out of thee shall he come forth unto me that is to be ruler in Israel†." He was to be a mean and dishonoured man: "He is despised and rejected of men; a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief: and we hid, as it were, our faces from him; he was despised and we esteemed him not‡." He was to be sold for a stipulated price; "They weighed for my price thirty pieces of silver§." He was to be put to an igno-

* Is. vii. 14. † Mic. v. 2.
‡ Is. liii. 3. § Zach. xi. 12.

minious death, which yet he was to bear patiently: "He was oppressed and he was afflicted, yet he opened not his mouth: he is brought as a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before her shearers is dumb, so he openeth not his mouth: he was taken from prison and from judgment; and who shall declare his generation? for he was cut off out of the land of the living: for the transgression of my people was he stricken*." His body was to be pierced, yet not a bone was to be broken: "They shall look upon me whom they have pierced†." "He keepeth all his bones: not one of them is broken‡." His burial was to be

* Is. liii. 7, 8. † Zach. xii. 10, with Psalm xxii. 16.
‡ Psalm xxxiv. 20.

distinguished: "He made his grave with the wicked, and with the rich in his death *."

Let any one take the history of our Lord as narrated by the evangelists, and see how exactly these predictions were accomplished. And they are precisely what a person could not accomplish for himself. This remark I think important. The prophecies respecting Jesus were not, for the most part, such as he could, had he been a common man, have voluntarily fulfilled. To explain more clearly my meaning. That, "rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion; shout O daughter of Jerusalem: behold thy king cometh...

* Is. liii. 9.

lowly and riding upon an ass, and upon a colt, the foal of an ass*," *was* of this nature. A man might resolve to fulfil it, and might easily procure some kind of fulfilment of it. But what man could predetermine the place of his birth, or provide for a marvel in his conception? And the sufferings and death inflicted upon Jesus, were by no procurement of his: they were the work of wicked men, who indulged their own ungodly lusts, and knew not, neither had it in their heart to accomplish, the prophetic word. All this is additional evidence that the ancient prophecies were dictated by that Eternal Spirit who alone "searcheth" and revealeth to men

* Zach. ix. 9.

"the deep things of God;" so that they ought to have been a sufficient proof to the Jews, that, in acknowledging the lowly Jesus as the long-looked for son of David, his disciples were not following "cunningly devised fables."

But further:—and it is what the apostle in this passage particularly alludes to—there was a scene in which he and certain others had been witnesses of Christ's majesty. "He received from God the Father, honour and glory, when there came such a voice to him from the excellent glory, this is my beloved Son in whom I am well pleased: and this voice, which came from heaven, we heard, when we were with him in the holy

mount." Such a manifestation could not be mistaken: and, as in the mouth of two or three witnesses every word shall be established, the testimony of the apostles, who suffered for the gospel's sake, was unexceptionable to confirm the doctrine, that the despised Galilean was truly the son of David, was rightly the king of Israel.

Let an unbeliever seriously consider the kind of evidence which is presented. It is impossible that there could have been collusion between the prophets, the last of whom flourished four hundred years before our era, and Jesus Christ: and yet the predictions, and the narrative, allowed on all hands to be authentic, fit together to

a degree of exact minuteness truly wonderful. Let it be remembered, that, in addition, a competent number of witnesses attest the miraculous powers and revealed glory of Jesus, which were also predicted, and then, if any man remain incredulous, I do not hesitate to say, that he manifests the mightiest credulity, in preferring to account for the coincidence of prophecy and history, by chance or designed imposture. He truly strains at a gnat and swallows a camel. I repeat this assertion. It may be proved that infidelity has greater difficulties to surmount than faith: it makes far larger demands on the credulity of its disciples, than ever did the wildest enthusiasm. For with respect to the evi-

dence from prophecy, if you attempt to call it mere coincidence, there are, in the prophetic roll, which extends over a period of a thousand years, a multitude of particular and separate predictions about the Messiah: now, humanly speaking, the chances were enormous against any one of these being fulfilled in a given individual; the probability against their all meeting an accomplishment in one man, as we find they did in Jesus, defies the power of calculation; and yet the unbeliever, if he denies the hand of directing and over-ruling power, first inspiring prophecy, then fulfilling it, must believe that this, so unlikely, so much in opposition to all reason, I will say, to possibility, not

only happened, but happened repeatedly. Verily the sceptic is the most unreasonable being in existence.

It may, therefore, be proved against every gainsayer, that Christ's first advent literally accomplished the prophecies which foretold it. I proceed:—

II. To the predictions of our Lord's second coming, and to argue, from the minuteness of accomplishment of prophecy relating to the first advent, that all that is predicted of the second will be as truly fulfilled.

It is very needful to draw men's attention to this part of the prophetic record. For there appears to prevail much practical disbelief of Christ's second coming. The age of wonders, many seem to think,

is past, and now there shall be no change in the regular order of the universe. Politicians arrange their plans, as if they deemed this world, the theatre of their machinations, eternal. Men talk of the march of intellect and spread of knowledge, and anticipate a continual improvement of nations, and calculate on for thousands of advancing years the accomplishment of their schemes, as if they imagined that the tide of events would never come to a full stop. Rarely, if ever, do you find it admitted as a principle, in business, or in books, not especially theological, that we are drawing to an end, advancing to a crisis—not the mere petty revolution of this or that empire, but—the catastrophe

of creation. There are individuals to be sure—and the number is perhaps increasing—who think of and believe in the return of Christ to judgment; but the multitude, the mass of the world, is uninfluenced by such thoughts. The mechanic goes to his daily labour, the merchant to his counting-house, the student to his books, with no apprehension that "the end of all things is at hand." If they credit theoretically the doctrine, they place the facts of it at the telescopic distance of many generations, too remote to be of interest or dear importance to themselves. I say, therefore, that the certainty of Christ's second coming ought to be diligently weighed: and I earnestly invite

your attention to the overwhelming evidence of it which the scripture furnishes.

It will be sufficient for my purpose to present to you here, a few of the most remarkable predictions. I take one from the Old Testament:—"I know that my Redeemer liveth, and that he shall stand at the latter day upon the earth *." It is plain that these words do not refer to the first coming of Christ; for, in the following verses, Job connects the coming he refers to with his own resurrection:—"and tho', after my skin, worms destroy this body, yet in my flesh shall I see God: whom I shall see for myself, and mine eyes shall behold and not another." Again, on our

* Job. xix. 25, 26, 27.

Lord's ascension, the angels assured the disciples, "this same Jesus, which is taken up from you into heaven, shall so come in like manner as ye have seen him go into heaven*." Again, St. Paul says, "the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God†." And in another epistle, "the Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven with his mighty angels in flaming fire‡." And once more, in the closing book of scripture we read, "behold he cometh with clouds, and every eye shall see him, and they also which pierced him: and all kindreds of the earth

* Acts. i. 11. † 1 Thess. iv. 16.
‡ 2 Thess. i. 7, 8.

shall wail because of him*." Some of the attendant circumstances are also described. The dead are to rise, and the living to be changed: for "the dead in Christ shall rise first: then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air†." The world is to be consumed by fire: in that day, "the heavens shall pass away with a great noise, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat; the earth also, and the works that are therein, shall be burnt up‡."

Now I argue, that as the prophecies were fulfilled—exactly—which described

* Rev. i. 7. † 1 Thess. iv. 16, 17.
‡ 2 Peter. iii. 10.

the conception, the birth-place, the lowliness, the judgment, the death, the burial of Christ; so will there be the clouds, the fire, the trumpet, the archangel's voice, the shout of attending myriads, the wailing woe, which shall be on all kindreds of the earth. The events are CERTAIN. *Your* eyes shall see that "pompous appearance;" *your* ears shall hear that tremendous voice, and you shall wail, bitterly and for ever, if you are not prepared to meet him.

This is the particular, and most important light, in which we are to view this matter. It takes its interest from *us*. *We* shall be the subjects of that day's solemnities. To *us* the Lord will come, to

judge us according to our works. He is the Master, then returning to his household, and punishing him that he finds drunken. He is the Lord, then reckoning with his servants, and requiring of them an account of the talents he had lent them. He is the moral Governor of the world, then coming to justify his ways in the sight of the universe—to inflict "tribulation and anguish upon every soul of man that doeth evil"—to render "glory, honour, and peace, to every man that worketh good."

Many persons are apt to lose sight of this point of chief importance: they wander—and Satan loves to lead them—into speculations about the particular time, and the precise manner of Christ's second

coming. The time,—presumptuous men! —hath not the Father reserved that within his own power? Our Saviour's awful words ought to sound the knell of every expectation to penetrate that mystery: "of that day and hour knoweth no man, no, not the angels of heaven, but my Father only*." The manner—one would think that these persons had sat in the councils of heaven, and helped to frame the purposes of the eternal mind. The time! yes, I will tell you of the time: it shall be when men are least expecting it, when they are eating and drinking, and marrying and giving in marriage, as when the flood came; then shall it come, when

* Matt. xxiv. 36.

scoffers are "walking after their own lust, and saying, where is the promise of his coming?" when *you*, peradventure, are dreaming of unbroken years of security, THEN shall the unearthly thunder, his apparitor, rend the firmament; then shall the fire, his minister, dissolve the elements; then "every eye shall see him, and the kindreds of the earth shall wail because of him." The manner! yes, I will tell you of the manner: that very Jesus who was crucified, shall descend in his body, and be looked on in glory; and the heavens and the earth shall flee away, and the dead shall hear his voice, and shall come forth, "some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt." So

much is revealed, but "secret things belong to God." And just as when our Lord came first, there were many circumstances in the manner of his coming, which even those that looked for him did not expect, so will it be now: the broad fact is written as with a sun-beam, "HE COMETH:" the where, the when, the how, as to minute particulars, are veiled in impenetrable darkness.

I will not enter into the controversies which have distracted the church on these points: they tend, I have had reason to know, to alienate the mind from the grand matter of fact, to puny speculations about mere circumstantials. Carry home with you, I repeat, the fact—he is coming.

Let it follow you to your retirement, and attend you in your business, "behold, he cometh," and I shall see him. And then, O brethren, ask your hearts, am I prepared to meet him? Can there be an inquiry so momentous? Postpone it not. Begin your preparation *now*. Now we may show you Christ the Saviour, the mild, compassionate Lord: his eye is not now lighted up with fury, his hand not yet stretched forth to destroy. He is still waiting to be gracious. He will blot out your iniquities in his own precious blood, that "cleanseth from all sin." Wash in it and you shall be clean. Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, and you, the very guiltiest of you, shall not be condemned at

his bar of judgment: you shall not perish, but shall have everlasting life.

I make a CLOSING observation.

The evidence of prophecy proves, every day more and more, the faithfulness of God. The researches of modern travellers are continually disclosing heretofore unknown accomplishments of ancient predictions*. The cities and nations which incurred his displeasure, Babylon, Tyre, Edom, are found to have been reduced precisely to the condition threatened. I use the same argument as before, from these facts. Will he, who has been true in his vengeance on his enemies, not be true in the full redemption of his people?

* See Quarterly Review, No. CV. Art. vi., for an interesting account of the exact fulfilment of prophecy respecting Idumea.

He has magnified his faithfulness in recompensing those who touched his chosen seed, "the apple of his eye:" he will surely magnify his faithfulness in rewarding according to its deserts, that world which crucified his Son, "the brightness of his glory." Truth demands that Christ should come again with power. Consistency demands it. If there were never any signs of his approach to be discerned, still it ought to be believed that he would come. But prophecy is even now fulfilling; and from the events of the times as they roll on, we may derive an additional illustration of the fact, that the words of inspired prophecy shall never fail.

And the accomplishment of prophecy assures the believer of the full accomplish-

ment of promise. As regards his own soul, he may expect the accurate fulfilment of this. He is therefore encouraged to place a humble, but unshaken trust, in the covenant mercies of the Lord. Yes! He *hath* borne, and he *will* carry; and every saint shall acknowledge with the dying patriarch, "not one thing hath failed of all the good things which the Lord . . . spake—all are come to pass . . . and not one thing hath failed thereof."

LECTURE II.

THE SUDDENNESS OF CHRIST'S SECOND COMING.

LUKE xvii., 26—30.

And as it was in the days of Noe, so shall it be also in the days of the Son of Man. They did eat, they drank, they married wives, they were given in marriage, until the day that Noe entered the ark, and the flood came and destroyed them all. Likewise also as it was in the days of Lot; they did eat, they drank, they bought, they sold, they planted, they builded; but the same day that Lot went out of Sodom, it rained fire and brimstone from heaven, and destroyed them all. Even thus shall it be in the day when the Son of Man is revealed.

IN the last discourse, I argued the certainty of Christ's return, in conformity with prophecy, from the fact of his first

appearance, exactly as had been predicted. To-day I lay before you the scripture testimony to the suddenness of Christ's second coming.

Generally speaking, God's "way is in the sea," his "path in the great waters," and his "footsteps are not known." Judgment is much more awful when it is executed unawares. An example is then more impressively held up to other offenders, a beacon, more clearly to warn them, that they perish not in a similar destruction. It is not meant that God does not give the world fair notice of his purposes: again and again, in every page of scripture, he denounces condemnation on the ungodly; only the precise time, when their

sentence will be executed, is concealed. And this is wise. For were it known that such a particular period of probation would *certainly* be allowed, men, naturally looking to the present, and regardless of the future, would take little serious thought till their time was just run out; whereas now, if they act at all as reasonable beings, they must look continually for that which, they are told, is most probably at their very doors. It is true that multitudes are unreasonable, and live as though they were certain of the future: if, however, their conduct be such, when the next moment may, for aught they know, place them before their Judge, at least as reckless, we may easily conclude, would be

their behaviour, if they could depend on an ascertained and lengthened respite. He that will not think, when he does not know that he has a day, will not be more serious if he is apprised that he certainly has a year: whereas, he that had been calculating on a definite period, would indisputably tremble if he found his life suspended on the frail tenure of the moment. It is on this principle that almost all the warnings of scripture are addressed to us, "be ye ready, for ye know not what hour your Lord doth come."

I proceed, without further preface, to the immediate consideration of the subject of the day: and I shall

I. Lay before you the scripture testimony to the suddenness of Christ's return.

II. Show you hence the fearful aggravations of the sinner's danger, and

III. Make some inferential observations.

May God, the Holy Spirit, deeply impress the truth on all your hearts!

I. The scriptures employ many illustrations to instruct us in this doctrine. Our Lord himself, in a passage quoted in the former discourse, expressly tells us, "of that day and hour knoweth no man, no not the angels of heaven, but my Father only." And he uses parables to convey the same fact. For instance, in the parable of the ten virgins, the bridegroom is represented as coming at midnight, a time

when the bridal company, wearied with waiting, had fallen into slumber. In another parable, he speaks of himself as the master of a family, who had left for a while his house. His servants, he proceeds, in consequence, abuse his absence to their own dissipation and licentiousness. But, continues our Saviour, when "that evil servant shall say in his heart, my lord delayeth his coming ..... the lord of that servant shall come in a day when he looketh not for him, and in an hour that he is not aware of*." He further likens his approach to the secret attack of a thief: "this know, that if the good man of the house had known what hour the

* Matt. xxiv. 48—50.

thief would come, he would have watched, and not have suffered his house to be broken through*." This last comparison is very frequently repeated. St. Paul employs and amplifies it, in writing to the Thessalonian church: "yourselves know perfectly, that the day of the Lord so cometh as a thief in the night; for when they shall say, peace and safety, then sudden destruction cometh upon them, as travail upon a woman with child†." St. Peter reiterates it: "the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night‡." St. John, in the Revelation, introduces One as saying, "behold, I come as a thief: blessed is he that watcheth, and keepeth his gar-

* Luke xii. 39. † 1 Thess. v. 2, 3. ‡ 2 Pet. iii. 10.

ments, lest he walk naked, and they see his shame*." And he closes the volume of inspiration with the solemn assurance: "He which testifieth these things saith, surely I come quickly. Amen. Even so, come, Lord Jesus†."

Sometimes the history of former ages is appealed to, as in my text, to show that God's terrible judgments have generally been executed when they were little expected. At the flood, men despised the warning, which Noah, a preacher of righteousness, was commanded to give them; they mocked the preparations which he was making for the safety of his household. They consequently "eat, they

* Rev. xvi. 15. † Rev. xxii. 20.

drank, they married wives, they were given in marriage, until the day that Noah entered into the ark, and the flood came and destroyed them all." The destruction of Sodom was equally unexpected. When Lot, by direction of the angels, entreated his sons-in-law to escape the danger which impended over them, he seemed, we are told, "as one that mocked unto his sons-in-law." And so "they did eat, they drank, they bought, they sold, they planted, they builded; but the same day that Lot went out of Sodom, it rained fire and brimstone from heaven, and destroyed them all." The last judgment on the Egyptians was similar. In spite of former plagues, Pharaoh persisted in re-

fusing to let the children of Israel go; he threatened Moses and Aaron that, if they saw his face again, they should be put to death; supposing possibly that now the Lord had done his worst. But "it came to pass that *at midnight*," in the hour of security, "the Lord smote all the first-born in the land of Egypt, from the first-born of Pharaoh that sat on his throne, unto the first-born of the captive that was in the dungeon, and all the first-born of cattle; and Pharaoh rose up in the night, he and all his servants, and all the Egyptians: and there was a great cry in Egypt, for there was not a house where there was not one dead *." And such was the deso-

* Exod. xii. 29, 30.

lation of Babylon. Though the city was beleaguered, yet she laughed her enemies to scorn; she sat like a queen upon her waters; she trusted in her lofty walls and brazen gates, and said, "I shall see no sorrow." And then there was revelry in the palace: "the king made a great feast," and he and "his princes, his wives, and his concubines, drank wine, and praised the gods of gold, and of silver, of brass, of iron, of wood, and of stone." In that hour of their security and merriment, came forth fingers of a man's hand, and wrote upon the palace wall the sentence of destruction. And, in the same night, was execution done: "In that night was Belshazzar, the king of the Chaldeans,

slain," and his kingdom was given to the Medes and Persians*.

I might adduce many other awful examples; but those, to which I have referred, are sufficient to show you that it is God's ordinary plan to bring sudden ruin on his enemies. He gives them, indeed, a warning; he lets them know that wrath is purposed against them, if, peradventure, they will take the warning, and escape: but if they neglect it, then he will give them over to judicial hardness and impenitence, till, in an hour that they think not, his vengeance is suddenly poured forth. I believe that it will be so at Christ's second coming. Already have abundant pre-

* Dan. v.

monitions been sent: we have been told that he will come—that he is coming—that he is at hand—and some have bethought themselves in time, have set their house in order, and are prepared to welcome his approach; but the mass of the world—how regardless are they of the fearful summons!—how blind to the impending danger!—and they will go on so, till the terrors of his presence shall surprise them at their business, their amusement, their jollity, their sins; and the crashing storm, and echoing trump, and blazing sky, and melting elements, shall dreadfully convince them that it is then too late to call upon the mountains to fall on them, and the rocks to hide them from

the face of Him that sitteth on his throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb.

Brethren, this is no idle picture, it shall surely be;—if inspiration be true, it shall surely be. Men shall rise to their accustomed occupations, and the world around them shall smile in its loveliness, as though it were built to last for ever; and they shall go forth in the gladness of their hearts; and they shall look, the young, and gay, and noble, for many years of enjoyment; and they shall say, each one in his heart, "Soul, take thine ease;"—and then, even then, shall the end be. The past delay of judgment encourages multitudes in their neglect of it. Just so the apostle warned us: "there shall come in the last days, scoffers, walking after their

own lusts, and saying, where is the promise of his coming? for since the fathers fell asleep, all things continue as they were from the beginning of the creation*." But the length of time which has elapsed since the prophecies were uttered, is a presumptive proof that their completion is not now far distant: the end long looked for must come at last; and every year, and day, and hour that passes by, drains out the small remnant that has yet to run.

Such is the scripture testimony of the suddenness of Christ's coming.

I proceed—

II. To show you how fearfully this aggravates the danger of sinners.

The reason why the coming of our Lord

* 2 Pet. iii. 3, 4.

is to be sudden, is, that "*as a snare*" it may "come on all them that dwell on the face of the whole earth;" that those who are disobeying his commands, and neglecting his service, may be detected, as it were, in the very act of transgression, and receive the righteous reward of their misdeeds. It is sudden, in order that it may be "sudden *destruction*;" not because the Lord has any pleasure in the death of a sinner, but because "he that being often reproved, hardeneth his neck, shall"—and it is most just, if there is to be anything like moral government in the universe—"suddenly be destroyed, and that without remedy."

Again, when judgment so comes un-

awares, it gives, on its actual approach, *no time for preparation.* Preparation for judgment is no light and easy business. He who is to stand his trial at an earthly bar, takes time to arrange his defence, to collect his evidence, to press his pleas: he would tremble to have his preparations cut short, and to be, without delay or respite, hurried before his judge. How much more awful is the tribunal of the Son of God: how much more strict the investigation which shall be made by him: how much more momentous the destinies which hang upon his decision! Would the most thoughtless of you like to be summoned, with his sins upon his head, to that presence? Why then does he

dare to sport upon the brink of ruin? There is much to be done, before mortal, guilty man can be just with God. He must deeply repent him of his sins. He must feel that godly ingenuous sorrow, which flows, not from the fear of punishment, but from a sense of the ingratitude shown to him, who has been his kind and gracious Father. He must look by simple faith to the Lord Jesus Christ, laying hold on his merits, and seeking to be found in him, not having on his own righteousness, but "the righteousness which is of God by faith." To this repentance and faith, there are the most formidable obstacles. The evil heart of unbelief must be changed; the power of Satan must be broken; the

force of worldly lust and evil habit must be conquered; nothing of which can be achieved, except by the mighty grace of God the Holy Spirit. Is all this to be put off to the last moment? What evidence could you then have that you were in earnest? Is it safe then—is it wise to delay? Is it possible, while the last trumpet is sounding, and the Son of God is descending, and the graves are opening, and the solemnities of judgment are beginning, that genuine repentance and lively faith should then at last be implanted? Repentance! yes, repentance will then come indeed; but it will be that biting, torturing, despairing remorse, the assured fearful looking-for of eternal judgment and

fiery condemnation. Faith! yes, faith will then be come; but it will be the wretched certainty of all that had been heretofore disbelieved—the necessity of renouncing sin; of separation from the world; of decision in religion; the fatal consequences of neglecting Christ, of resisting truth—all that the ministers of God proclaim, and which is now so coldly received, will then be believed by undone sinners, when it is too late to rescue them from the devouring flame. For as that day finds you, so will you continue through eternity: there will then be no possibility of change: he that has been filthy, must be filthy still.

Further, the danger of sinners is increased, because they are *expressly told*

that judgment will be sudden. You are not informed, as I have shown you, of the precise period of its arrival; but you are assured that "the Lord is at hand." However unprepared any one of you may be, he will not be able to assign his unpreparedness to a want of warning. You have all the warning you can reasonably expect; warning enough to convict you—if that day should find you unready—not of neglect only, but of wilful impenitence. You have now the opportunity of escape; you have now the blessings of the gospel offered; of which you shall none of you be ignorant—Christ died for your sins; he suffered, in your place, the punishment of your transgressions: you are guilty, but I

am authorized, in his name, to proclaim, through faith in him, a full, free, glorious pardon to the very chief of sinners. If you refuse it, you have yourselves alone to blame: you seal to yourselves your own condemnation.

Such are some of the aggravations of the sinner's danger, from the suddenness of coming judgment.

I proceed—

III. To the inferential observations I proposed to make.

1. We must suffer no frivolous objections to weaken in our minds the force of this truth. It has been said, for instance, that many generations of men have passed away, since that to whom especially the

warnings of my text, about our Lord's coming, were addressed, and yet the judgment is not come. How, it is urged, is this fact to be reconciled with the repeated assurances of the nearness of his approach? and does it not prove to us that *we* need be in no such immediate expectation? I reply, that the scripture expression—"the coming of the Lord," intends, not one or two events merely, but, more generally, any remarkable interference of God's power, most frequently for the infliction of judgment. This may, I think, without difficulty be proved, as I will endeavour to show by a few quotations. In "the burden of Egypt," we read, "Behold, the Lord rideth upon a swift cloud, and shall

come into Egypt; and the idols of Egypt shall be moved at his presence, and the heart of Egypt shall melt in the midst of it*," which prediction was accomplished, in the anarchy which prevailed in Egypt after the destruction of Sennacherib's army, in the conquest of that country by Nebuchadnezzar, and in the cruel sway which he and his successors, and afterwards the Persian kings, held over the wretched inhabitants. Again, our Lord says, "Verily, I say unto you, there be some standing here, who shall not taste of death, till they see the Son of Man *coming* in his kingdom*." I cannot believe the interpretation proposed, that this prophecy was

* Is. xix. 1. † Matt. xvi. 28.

fulfilled in our Lord's transfiguration, which certain of the disciples beheld, would ever have been seriously thought of, had it not been to prop up a system. The common-sense explanation is, as appears to me, that Christ referred to the destruction of Jerusalem. Further, when St. Paul writes, "Let your moderation be known unto all men: the Lord *is at hand* *," it is not likely that he meant, either the final consummation of all things, for he could not be ignorant that that was many ages distant; or even the destruction of Jerusalem, for it is not easy to see what peculiar visitation of the Philippian church would result from that event. He doubt-

* Phil. iv. 4.

less intended "that hour of temptation," which was coming "upon all the world, to try them that dwelt upon the earth;" that sharp persecution, which would sift them, and prove their faith, wherein many should attain the crown of martyrdom, and should thus have the strongest proof, that the present life was vanishing, and its distinctions not worth craving. Neither can a personal coming be predicted in the passage, "Be ye also patient; stablish your hearts, for the *coming* of the Lord draweth nigh*." And once more, in the epistles to the Asiatic churches, we read, "I will *come* unto thee quickly, and will remove thy candlestick out of his place, except thou

* James, v. 8.

repent*:" "Repent, or else I will *come* unto thee quickly, and will fight against them with the sword of my mouth†:" "If therefore thou shalt not watch, I will *come* on thee as a thief, and thou shalt not know what hour I will come on thee‡." That these predictions have been certainly accomplished, is clear from the testimony of all modern travellers, who assure us that the churches are in precisely the miserable condition, to which our Lord threatened that he would bring them. But how have they been accomplished? by what kind of coming? by a personal appearance? no: but by the flood of desolation, which rolled over the

* Rev. ii. 5. † Rev. ii. 16. ‡ Rev. iii. 3.

eastern world, when the disciples of the Arabian false prophet propagated, with the sword their master's tenets, and reduced what had once been "the garden of the Lord" to a waste and blighted, parched and howling wilderness. There has been therefore no lack of fulfilment of the prophetic denunciations of the Lord's coming. But there is one grand coming, when he shall be literally revealed in flaming fire. From the solemnities of this, circumstances have been borrowed to describe the former figurative advents; and so far from invalidating the evidence of his literal appearance, the lapse of ages, during which there have been the accomplishments of all other judgments, strengthens

the assurance that this shall be accomplished also. Instead of admitting, therefore, that we need be in no immediate expectation, we ought to recollect that every hour is hurrying us towards the consummation of all things, and adding to the probabilities of its near approach. As I have said, quoting our Saviour's words, "of that day knoweth no man," with any degree of precision: but I profess to you, if I look with common attention around me, I see many signs of "the last days." The great drama of the world seems winding to its close. Events, prophetically announced, appear hastening to completion; and for aught that you or I can tell, *our* living eyes may look on that

which our fathers have not seen. But I am anticipating the subject of the next discourse. I would only here add, that what has been said of the suddenness of judgment, applies with momentous interest to the uncertain ravages of death. Death, to the individual, is the same in its consequence as judgment. And I stand on no conjectural ground when I say, that there are those before me who soon—aye, *very* soon—shall be hurried, by the unexpected summons of death, into the awful presence of God. O, are ye ready to meet him?

2. I have one more observation. If judgment be so sudden and destructive, we are bound to resort to a *safe* retreat.

When a wide-spread desolation overwhelms the land, it is not every place of refuge that will afford security. When the flood came upon the world, multitudes, no doubt, scaled the mountains, and imagined that there they should be beyond the reach of the tempestuous billows. But the waters prevailed above the highest mountain-top, and the ark only, into which the Lord had shut his people, was a place of deliverance. When Lot was warned to go forth from Sodom, he was assured that he must not tarry anywhere in the plain, for there, too, destruction would overtake him: he must flee unto the mountain, the appointed refuge, if he would not be consumed. And so against the coming judgment, beware that

you have a stable hope. Your moral conduct will not save you; your fear of punishment will not save you; your resolutions of amendment will not save you. These, like the mountain-tops, would disappear, one after another, surmounted by the flood. Nothing will save you but the ark of mercy, the blood and righteousness of Jesus Christ embraced by faith. Men will mock you when you speak of danger; they will tell you that you need not be too earnest about religion: but the scriptures tell you that *it* is the "one thing needful," the pervading principle which ought to rule your thoughts, and words, and actions. Men will tell you, that God is merciful, and will excuse your imperfections: but

the scriptures tell you, that he will "by no means clear the guilty." Continuing in sin, you must be ruined. You cannot escape, except, urged as it were by angel hands, you seek the Rock of Ages, and lay hold on Christ, not in a mere cold formal way, but with heart, and soul, and warm affections, taking him for your Lord and your God.

May the Spirit convince you of the danger in which you naturally stand: may he incline each of you to inquire with befitting anxiety, What must I do to be saved? May he lead you to the Redeemer who shed his precious blood for sinners, and there, through faith in him, give rest and peace unto your souls!

LECTURE III.

WATCHFULNESS FOR CHRIST'S SECOND COMING.

MARK xiii. 35, 36, 37.

Watch ye, therefore, for ye know not when the Master of the house cometh; at even, or at midnight, or at the cock-crowing, or in the morning: lest coming suddenly he find you sleeping. And what I say unto you, I say unto all—watch.

THE suddenness of our Lord's approach is, as I observed in the last discourse, taken in scripture, as an argument why those who profess to be his disciples should watch for him. He has fixed no particular hour:

therefore we should be *always* ready. Yet though the *hour* is not noted, the time, generally speaking, is designated by certain marks. He is said to come as a thief: but though the master of the house knoweth not the exact time, yet, generally, the thief cometh in the night. Christ is said to come as a bridegroom to the wedding supper: but though the virgins were not aware of the precise moment, yet, generally speaking, the cry of the bridegroom's arrival was, by ancient custom, at midnight. And so our Lord, in the verses before my text, just previous to warning his disciples against that impertinent curiosity which would settle exactly the time of his coming, gives some general indications of the period when

he might be expected, and adds, "learn a parable of the fig-tree: when her branch is yet tender, and putteth forth leaves, ye know that summer is near: so ye, in like manner, when ye shall see these things come to pass, know that it is nigh, even at the doors." When the prognostications of his approach, therefore, are visible, then *especially* his disciples must watch. They must be always ready: but when, to change the metaphor, the distant streaks of ruddy light proclaim the night far spent, the day at hand, then, especially, must they that are of the day watch and be sober.

I lay before you, in this third advent sermon, the necessity of watchfulness in respect of Christ's second coming. The

meaning of my text is general: "What I say unto you, I say unto all, watch." The professed followers of Jesus in every age and clime are most deeply interested in it.

I shall call your attention—

I. To the reasons why we are to watch.

II. To the manner in which our watchfulness must be exercised.

May God the Holy Spirit powerfully impress us all with a sense of the danger of sinful spiritual negligence!

I. I am first to speak of the reasons why we are to watch. This duty is but a plain inference from the facts which I laid before you in the preceding discourse, that the sore judgments of the Lord have ever been inflicted in an hour unlooked for.

The suspension of any threatened judgment is a reason for *increasing* watchfulness. If indeed there were no certainty of its arriving at last, a long delay might furnish, perhaps, some presumptive evidence that all things would ever continue as they were, unchanged: but when we know that what is predicted will assuredly, at some period, be accomplished, the length of the time that is already elapsed is an argument that little yet remains unspent. Does any man imagine, because he has lived sixty, seventy, eighty years, and not seen death, that *therefore* he shall never, or not for a long time, die? Why, he learns from the mere tale of the years that he has numbered, that now he is on the brink of

the grave. When the tide has long been flowing in, we are sure that the ebb is near at hand. And though the aged man knows not the exact hour, when he shall be summoned from life, yet he has infirmities and sorrows, which warn him to set his house in order. So we have tokens of the world's decrepitude, signs of the last days, which they that are wise are commanded by our Lord to recognise. If we see these, we are surely called to watchfulness. To neglect them, would be like folly as if Belshazzar had braved the vision of the handwriting upon his palace wall, and persisted in his impious revelry.

I shall, in this part of my subject, endeavour to trace the scripture character of

the last days, and point out to you some of those clouds, rising upon the world, which seem to prognosticate the storm. I must premise, that there are some controverted points, on which it would be foreign to my purpose to touch. I take the plain scriptural ground, that, in what are called "the last days," there is to be a coming of the Lord, preceded and attended with tremendous judgments: and I add my conviction that the disastrous character of these last days is *now* somewhat apparent. Whether the coming of the Lord referred to, be one of those figurative advents, not, as I have proved, uncommon in the bible, or, indeed, that great solemnity, when the Judge shall visibly descend from heaven, and the dead

shall hear his voice, and the earth shall be on fire, I am not called on here to decide. It need not be objected that this indecision is inconsistent with my former discourses. In them, indeed, I particularly proved the certainty and suddenness of Christ's personal and final advent: yet it is anything but incongruous, while exhorting you to watch for *that*, to say that the signs of some, of any, coming, whether the last or not, whether literal or figurative, are now discernible.

Our Lord, in the celebrated prophecy which he delivered shortly before his death, gave his disciples warning of the near destruction of Jerusalem, and of the judgments of the latter days. It is not,

perhaps, easy, with perfect accuracy, to separate the different parts of this prophecy. There are, however, three particular series of events, which, it seems to me, Christ intended to foretel, as betokening the latter times: and my opinion is confirmed, as I shall show you, by other predictions of the sacred volume.

The first is, the occurrence of remarkable calamities upon the earth. Nation is to rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom, with great earthquakes, and famines, and pestilences. "There shall be signs in the sun, and in the moon, and in the stars; and upon the earth distress of nations, with perplexity; the sea and the waves roaring; men's hearts failing

them for fear, and for looking after those things which are coming on the earth . . . and then shall they see the Son of Man coming in a cloud with power and great glory *." "When these things (adds our Saviour) *begin* to come to pass, then look up, and lift up your heads, for your redemption draweth nigh."

The second series of events referred to, as denoting the last times, is the extended preaching of the gospel, and amplification of the church. "This gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in all the world for a witness unto all nations; and then shall the end come †." Very similar is the prediction in the Revelation: "I saw another

* Luke xxi. 25, 26, 27, 28. † Matt. xxiv. 14.

angel fly in the midst of heaven, having the everlasting gospel to preach unto them that dwell on the earth, and to every nation, and kindred, and tongue, and people, saying with a loud voice, fear God, and give glory to him; *for the hour of his judgment is come**." In close connexion also are the prophecies of the conversion of the Jews; and it is remarkable that that, it is said, will take place in the latter days, in a time of great trouble, and at the era of a coming of the Lord. "For the children of Israel shall abide many days without a king, and without a prince, and without an ephod, and without teraphim. Afterwards shall the children of Israel return,

* Rev. xiv. 6, 7.

and seek the Lord their God, and David their king, and shall fear the Lord and his goodness in the latter days *." "And at that time shall Michael stand up, the great prince which standeth for the children of thy people; and there shall be a time of trouble, such as never was, since there was a nation, even to that same time; and at that time thy people shall be delivered†." "As one whom his mother comforteth, so will I comfort you; and ye shall be comforted in Jerusalem . . . for, behold, the Lord will come, and with his chariots like a whirlwind, to render his anger with fury, and his rebuke with flames of fire . . . and they shall bring all your

* Hos. iii. 4, 5. † Dan. xii. 1.

brethren for an offering unto Jehovah, out of all nations . . . to my holy mountain Jerusalem, saith the Lord *." I may add here that striking prediction, "The sixth angel poured out his vial upon the great river Euphrates; and the water thereof was dried up, that the way of the kings of the east might be prepared†." Immediately after which we read, "Behold, I come as a thief: blessed is he that watcheth." It can hardly be doubted that, as the loosing of four angels bound in the river Euphrates, in an earlier part of this prophecy, intended the establishment and dominion of the Turkish power, the verse just quoted predicts the downfall and gradual decay of the same empire, and consequently, as may be

* Is. lxvi. 13, 15, 20. † Rev. xvi. 12.

expected, the sapping of the foundations of the Mohammedan religion. So much for the promulgation of the gospel in the latter days.

The third series of events is the intestine troubles and heresies of the church. "In those days shall be affliction, such as was not from the beginning of the creation ... neither shall be ... and then if any man shall say to you, lo! here is Christ; or, lo! he is there, believe him not: for false Christs and false prophets shall rise, and shall show signs and wonders, to seduce, if it were possible, even the elect. But take ye heed: behold I have told you all things *." The apostles, too, give us a gloomy picture of the degeneracy and dark-

* Mark. xiii. 19, 21, 22, 23.

ness of the last days. St. Paul instructs Timothy, "This know also, that in the last days perilous times shall come. For men shall be lovers of their ownselves, covetous, boasters, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy, without natural affection, truce breakers, false accusers, incontinent, fierce, despisers of those that are good, traitors, heady, high-minded, lovers of pleasures more than lovers of God, having a form of godliness, but denying the power thereof *." The same apostle describes one remarkable apostacy in striking words, which, whether or not we interpret them of the apostate Church of Rome, convey the same general

* 2 Tim. iii. 1—5.

truth: "That day shall not come except there come a falling away first, and that man of sin be revealed, the son of perdition; who opposeth and exalteth himself above all that is called God, or that is worshipped; so that he, as God, sitteth in the temple of God, showing himself that he is God... the mystery of iniquity doth already work, only he who now letteth will let, until he be taken out of the way: and then shall that wicked be revealed, whom the Lord shall consume with the spirit of his mouth, and shall destroy with the brightness of his coming*." St. Peter speaks of those living in the last times, as "presumptuous, self-willed, not afraid to

* 2 Thess. ii. 3, 4 7, 8.

speak evil of dignities *;" and in a passage of which I before quoted a part, predicts infidelity, declaring "There shall come in the last days, scoffers, walking after their own lusts, and saying, where is the promise of his coming? for since the fathers fell asleep, all things continue as they were from the beginning of the creation: for this they willingly are ignorant of that... the heavens and the earth . . . are kept in store, reserved unto fire against the day of judgment and perdition of ungodly men †." I will add but another testimony: it is that of St. Jude. "Beloved, remember ye the words which were spoken before of the apostles of our Lord Jesus Christ; how

* 2 Pet. ii. 10. † 2 Pet. iii. 3, 4, 5, 7, 8.

that they told you there should be mockers in the last time, who should walk after their own ungodly lusts: these be they who separate themselves, sensual, having not the Spirit *."

I will make one remark on these quotations. If any objection be raised in regard to the expression "last days," and it be thought that it implies merely the time subsequent to Messiah, it is sufficient to observe, that, in several of the passages, the coming of Christ is especially predicted in connexion with the signs described.

And now, brethren, look around on the world, and see if you cannot somewhere discern symptoms of the accomplishment of

* Jude, 17, 18, 19.

some of these predictions. Is there no distress of nations? no perplexity? are there no pestilences ravaging the earth? no wars and rumours of wars? It may be replied, that these have often heretofore been, and that we see only what our fathers have seen. I know that the human mind is prone to raise into undue importance what is present; but I cannot help thinking that, in this quarter of the world, the seat of the Roman Empire, to which so many of the prophecies are confined, there never, under all circumstances, were such revolutions, so strange, so bloody, so disastrous, as in our times. The thrones of kings have unexpectedly crumbled; dynasties have been changed; men have risen into

command and sovereignty with a suddenness hardly compatible with the probabilities of a romance. Never, perhaps, were there so many monarchs in exile: never were there fiercer wars: never were the foundations of society so loosened.

Again, is not now the gospel preached, and Christianity, in some measure, planted throughout all the world? Till within a comparatively very few years, the church slept an ill-omened sleep; she took no thought for the millions that were perishing for lack of knowledge: now, faithful men, from almost every Christian nation, are traversing the globe. They have proclaimed the Saviour under the burning suns of India; they have preached the

gospel amid the snows of Labrador; they have prevailed upon the islanders of the far-off sea to cast their idols "to the moles and to the bats." Yet a little while, and the blood-stained banner of the cross shall be fanned by every gale, and wave over every nation. "This gospel shall be preached in all the world for a witness; and *then shall the end come.*" And with respect to the Jews, it is true that they are still as dry bones in the open valley, they are not yet come together, "bone to his bone," yet it may be admitted that there is "a noise, and behold a shaking." A little while ago and it might have been said of Israel, "this is Zion whom no man seeketh after:" now, the affections of Christians are awakening

towards that afflicted people, there is among themselves a growing spirit of inquiry, and even some few Jews are preaching to their brethren the salvation of a crucified Redeemer. As yet it is the day of small things, but still a sign of the times; the cloud, peradventure, little as a man's hand, just rising from the sea, which yet prognosticates, and that ere long, a great and gracious rain. And who can look at the aspect of the Mohammedan powers, and not discern the exact accomplishment of the prophecy? The vial is poured on the Euphrates, and its waters are drying up, precisely, drying up. The conqueror's hand has been stayed from inflicting violent destruction; and the resources of the Turkish

empire have *gradually* decayed: one province after another has parted from her, and that once mighty nation, so terrible to Christendom, seems dissolving by intestine weakness. What purpose God may intend to accomplish in its final fall, it is not for us at present to speak with any certainty: it is enough that the evident fact, that the bulwarks of Islamism are crumbling under their own weight, is a remarkable sign of the times.

Further, are there no divisions, no heresies, no strange assumptions and monstrous doctrines within the pale of the visible church? The Romish apostacy still lingers on, and even seems collecting itself for one great struggle, preparatory, may it not be,

to its destruction by the "brightness of His coming?" And is there no infidelity, no departing from the faith? Why, a few years back, a mighty nation declared, by statute and decree, that religion was a cheat, that the scriptures were an imposture, that death was an eternal sleep, and that there was no God. When was this done heretofore? Miserable *individuals* there have been in every age, who have rejected the counsel of God against themselves, but never, as in these times, did infidelity so rise up in its might, never did a nation, as one man, so hurl defiance against the Mightiest, and blaspheme the God of heaven.

I omit many other particulars, on which

I might dwell; and the more readily, because I am not willing to appear to be making out a case. I would rather that you would carry this subject to your retirement, and deliberately for yourselves examine facts. Look upon the church of Christ, and upon the world at large: is not the aspect of society so changed, the ancient landmarks so removed, the foundations of things so broken up and disorganised, that even mere politicians have argued a coming conflict more fearful than the past, a conflict of opposing principles? Perceive you not then an unquiet sea, just ready, as it were, to boil into that desolating storm, which shall sweep over the earth with the besom of destruction?

It is a question of awful interest how far our own country will share in such a judgment. I believe that there is more real religion in this land than in any other, more faithful servants of God: and yet our national sins—our Sabbath-breaking, for example, from the Sunday travelling and Sunday banquet of the noble to the revelry of the mechanic, the curse of Sunday newspapers, a plague unknown a few years back, the growing intemperance of the lower orders, the contempt for authority, the substitution of human reason for divine rule, the tendency to put all religions on a level, the monstrous doctrine, warmly advocated, that rulers have nothing to do with the religious instruction of those they

govern—our national sins, of which I might easily make out a heavy catalogue, may well inspire us with apprehension. There is much, I acknowledge thankfully, that is doing among us for God: there is much also, alas, that is doing for Satan. Knowledge has certainly of late been more widely diffused than heretofore; but men have forgotten that there is a knowledge both of good and ill. Religion is, I hope, extending: but evil is increasing too, it is concentrating its powers, it is assuming a bolder front of defiance, and while some are being turned to righteousness, "evil men and seducers wax worse and worse."

If it be so with us, what must be the state of other countries, galled with the papal chain, or cumbered with idolatrous

superstitions; where the beacon of divine truth, when lighted at all, only serves to show more palpably the darkness that surrounds it—what, I say, must be the state of other countries, in the eye of the High and Holy One? "As a cage is full of birds, so are their houses full of deceit, therefore they are become great, and waxen rich: they are waxen fat, they shine: yea, they overpass the deeds of the wicked: they judge not the cause, the cause of the fatherless, yet they prosper: and the right of the needy do they not judge. Shall I not visit for these things? saith the Lord: shall not my soul be avenged on such a" world "as this*." Yes, when their cup is full, surely "the Lord will come out of his place, to

* Jer. v. 27, 28, 29.

punish the inhabitants of the earth for their iniquity."

I hasten—

II. To the manner in which a befitting watchfulness must be exercised.

1. And first, we should strive to understand "the signs of the times." "Whoso is wise will ponder these things." Our Lord rebuked the Jews for not having recognised the tokens of his first approach: and he will equally rebuke us, if we be blind to the omens of his second advent. I am very far from encouraging vain and speculative inquiries into things which God has hidden; but I must say, the broad lines of prophecy, the great general features, as delineated in scripture, you

ought to know. There is an especial blessing pronounced on him that readeth, and on those that hear the words of that book, in which is recorded the prophetic history of the church, and that "keep those things which are written therein *." And surely, if as the hours of darkness roll on, and the dawn approaches, it becomes us to be wakeful, we ought by no means now to omit the inquiry, "Watchman, what of the night? Watchman, what of the night?"

2. Next, let it be the point of chief importance, to attain that one needful thing, the saving knowledge of God in Jesus Christ. His servants are then, when the signs of his approach are seen, to

* Rev. i. 3.

lift up their heads, as their "redemption draweth nigh:—to them that look for him shall he appear, the second time, without sin, unto salvation:"—they that have their lamps trimmed and burning go in with him to the marriage. There is nothing, believe me, which, whether in the hour of tribulation upon earth, or in the day of final judgment, can uphold the soul, but simple lively faith in Christ. With this, you need not fear, "though the earth be removed, and though the mountains be carried into the midst of the sea." And therefore, my friends, cultivate, I pray you, personal religion. You are all, by nature, in danger of God's wrath; if you die as you were born, you cannot see the

kingdom of heaven. You must be washed from your sins in Christ's precious blood; you must be renewed by his holy Spirit; you must enlist under his banner; you must be clothed in his armour:—so only can you "stand in the evil day." Recollect that "a fiery trial" is to try you; not, indeed, as though "some strange thing" happened to you; but the piercing eye of God will judge you, will search your heart, and prove your reins; and if you have only that religion which the world deems sufficient, you will then be found miserably wanting. Christ is now willing to save you. Flee to him for pardon. Plead his blood and righteousness. Lay hold on his promises. And thus entering into

chambers of security, and shutting the doors about you, you shall hide yourselves "as it were for a little moment, until the indignation be overpast."

3. Again: keep a steady grasp upon first principles. No man in a shipwreck loads himself with trifles; he waits for the parting of his vessel, with those things only about him which are of greatest value. And so, "hold that fast which thou hast, that no man take thy crown," was our Lord's admonition to the Asiatic church in the prospect of his coming. One characteristic of the last days, is a running, with "itching ears," after curious and unsound speculations. Be aware of Satan's devices. He would have you blown about

with every "wind of doctrine." The truths which are necessary to salvation, are those good old downright doctrines, which shine in every page of scripture, which the apostles continually preached, and for which the martyrs bled. The total corruption of man's nature, the atonement by the vicarious sufferings and death of Christ, justification through faith in him, regeneration by the power of the Spirit, good works, the fruit of faith; these, which exalt the free grace and sovereign love of God, which have stood the test of ages, are pared and smoothed by modern squeamishness; but they are the grand fundamental truths, which *must* be held, if you would attain eternal life. Let no

man by cunning craftiness beguile you of these. Hold them in their breadth and length, and glorious fulness. Seek to be rooted and grounded surely in them.

4. Further: sobriety is in scripture often inculcated as a part of watchfulness; "the end of all things is at hand: be ye therefore sober, and watch unto prayer*." The term means moderation generally. And it is well explained by the apostle Paul: "This I say, brethren, the time is short: it remaineth, that both they that have wives be as though they had none; and they that weep, as though they wept not; and they that rejoice, as though they rejoiced not; and they that buy, as though

* 1 Pet. iv. 7.

they possessed not; and they that use this world, as not abusing it: for the fashion of this world passeth away*." Worldly distinctions will soon be confounded; worldly honours will speedily disappear: for God, in his judgments, is no "respecter of persons:" "the day of the Lord of hosts shall be upon every one that is proud and lofty, and upon every one that is lifted up, and he shall be brought low." So watch then, as to regard the things of this world, just as if the judgments were ready to begin: do not encumber yourselves with earthly cares. Now, more than ever, should you know that you are strangers and pilgrims here, be loose to the things of

* 1 Cor. vii. 29—31.

time and sense, and place your affections on that heavenly country where there is no revolution, no decay.

5. I have one admonition more: watch against every appearance of evil. Shew yourselves manfully and decidedly upon the Lord's side. It is no time for the soldier to go straying from his ranks, when the battle is just beginning; it is no time for the servant of the Lord to be hesitating and lukewarm, when the wheels of his chariot are heard approaching. His coming will be a day of trial and sifting; stand then firmly at your post: his coming will be a day of struggle and of conflict; be then courageous in the Lord's quarrel. Be bold in testifying against every sin; be

resolute in shaking from you the *touch* of every unclean thing. There is now, more than ever, a work to be done by each professing follower of Jesus. *He* must not, when the world is full of business and activity, be idle. He must not spend his energies in vanity. He must watch for every opportunity of usefulness. He must improve, with the covetous eagerness of a miser, every talent entrusted to him. "Blessed is that servant, whom his Lord, when he cometh, shall find so doing."

LECTURE IV.

NECESSITY OF PRESENT PREPARATION FOR CHRIST'S COMING.

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2 Cor. vi. 2.

For he saith, I have heard thee in a time accepted, and in the day of salvation have I succoured thee: behold, now is the accepted time; behold, now is the day of salvation.

Every thing, both for this life, and for that to come, depends upon the proper employment of the present time. We have no right to count upon the future, for we know not "what a day may bring forth:" all that we can truly call our own is the

moment that is now passing. If it be necessary to act upon this truth for temporal success, it is much more necessary to act on it as respects eternity. For worldly losses may, peradventure, be repaired—at all events, they are of no such mighty and momentous interest—but nothing can compensate for the loss of the soul; no repentance or remorse can repair that ruin.

I argued, in the first discourse, that as all things which Moses and the prophets had predicted, concerning Christ, when he first appeared, were accurately fulfilled, so it is most sure, that what the same inspired men have foretold, must be accomplished in his return to judgment. In the second,

I proved to you, that the history of the world was evidence that the day of the Lord so cometh as "a thief in the night," —his desolating judgments have been ever sudden—all analogy therefore goes to confirm the annunciation, that, in a day when men look not for him, the thunders of his presence shall burst upon them. In the third discourse, I urged the necessity of watchfulness, from a consideration of the signs of the times: I said, I thought we might discern the symptoms of a rising storm—whether of that great catastrophe, when the earth shall be consumed, I did not take upon me to decide—but that there were some presumptive proofs, though the precise time of God's purposes

could not, by mortal ingenuity, be fixed on, that we are now amid "the last days:" I exhorted you, therefore, to set your house in order. I am here, as an inference from the whole subject, to enforce the paramount importance of present preparation. The mariner, who sees the dark cloud in the horizon, hastens to reach, if possible, a sheltering port: much more will they that are wise "enter into the rock and hide them in the dust, for fear of the Lord, and for the glory of his majesty, when he ariseth to shake terribly the earth," "when the earth shall disclose her blood, and shall no more cover her slain."

I proceed to the immediate consideration of my subject, and I shall shew you,

I. That *now* there is a hope of safety: "now is the accepted time."

II. That that time cannot be much prolonged.

May God the Holy Spirit incline you all to know this your day of visitation, and to embrace the things that make for your peace, before they be hid from your eyes!

I. To the first point. God never inflicts punishment without giving some intimation of his purpose. Our first parents were warned of the danger of touching the tree of knowledge. The fate which befel them was only what had previously been announced. Noah was, in like manner, a preacher of righteousness to the antedilu-

vian world. The building of his ark was, for upwards of a century, a prognostication of the coming flood. Lot was also permitted to warn his relatives of the destruction of Sodom; and, by their means, it might be generally known, even in the short interval allowed, that judgment was impending. These seasons of warning were for the especial purpose of persuading sinners to repent, and so to render unnecessary the threatened doom. For God "desireth not the death of a sinner, but rather that he may turn from his wickedness and live." We have a remarkable proof of this in the mission of Jonah to Nineveh. "Yet forty days, and Nineveh shall be destroyed." But the Ninevites attended to the warning.

They put on sackcloth, they humbled themselves before God, they turned from the error of their ways, they besought his mercy. And the sentence was revoked. "God repented of the evil, that he had said that he would do unto them, and he did it not." This may shew that the warning is not, as some would have it, sent merely for the purpose of aggravating the transgressor's guilt. Certainly, if it be disregarded, it makes those who are so foolish more inexcusable; but it is fairly and mercifully meant, and he that obeys it shall escape.

The admonitions which you receive, to prepare to meet your God, testify that *as yet* there is with him "plenteous redemption."

The only safe refuge from the judgments, whether temporal or eternal, which are coming on the world, is in the mercy of God as revealed in Jesus Christ. And I am to shew you, that this is abundantly sufficient. For God has laid help on "One mighty to save," "even to the uttermost," those that come to him by his dear Son. The sacrifice of Christ was for the sins of the whole world. He paid a boundless price for our redemption. There could be nothing more valuable than the life of that Holy One, who, being God, took on him the form of a man. And, therefore, there is an infinite provision, in his death, for the salvation of all who will accept it. This, he particularly authorises his ministers to pro-

claim. We do not, on our own responsibility or conjecture, tell you of the gospel: we are, though by no special revelation, yet as surely, commissioned as the "ambassadors of Christ, as though God did beseech you by us" to "pray you, in Christ's stead, be ye reconciled to God." This charge was first given to the apostles: they were to "preach the gospel unto *every* creature;" and they were to appoint others to succeed them in this honourable office. There was thus to be a stream of witnesses for God. For, even to the end of time, our Lord promised to be with his faithful servants, confirming and making good their invitations in his name, to the establishment and enlargement of his church. And,

therefore, I may tell you boldly that "the blood of Jesus Christ cleanseth from all sin." I may assure you, if "the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts, and return unto the Lord," that "He will have mercy upon him:" and "to our God," that "He will abundantly pardon." Christ will not reject any penitent sinner: he will not throw off the hold which trembling faith would seek to lay upon him. And if you be really his believing people, you need fear no evil. The rising storm shall not sweep you from your covert. The pestilence may walk in darkness, the destruction may waste at noonday, a thousand may fall at your side, and ten thousand at your right; but it shall

not *then* come nigh you, only with your eyes shall you behold and see the reward of the wicked. And at the last grand solemnity of judgment, if here you have believed in Jesus, the Judge shall pronounce you his friends: "Enter ye into the joy of your Lord." An interest in Christ is *now* offered you: you may *now* obtain that happy freedom from evil, from condemnation, from destruction. If the word of God be true, if Christ have not deceived his ministers, if his blood possess the virtue it is said to have, "*now* is the accepted time, *now* is the day of salvation."

I am to shew—

II. That the day of grace cannot be much prolonged.

"Thus saith the Lord God, an evil, an

only evil, behold, is come: an end is come, the end is come: it watcheth for thee: behold, it is come: the morning is come unto thee . . . the time is come, the day of trouble is near, and not the sounding again of the mountains. Now will I shortly pour out my fury upon thee, and accomplish mine anger upon thee, and I will judge thee according to thy ways, and thine abominations that are in the midst of thee: and mine eye shall not spare, neither will I have pity . . . and ye shall know that I am the Lord that smiteth. Behold the day, behold, it is come*." Such is the terrific language, in which God describes the approaching end of his forbearance.

I have shewn you, in the former dis-

* Ezek. vii. 5—10.

courses, that often the thunderbolt was just suspended, as it were, while proclamation of escape was made. If the proclamation was disregarded, it assuredly lighted on the head of the venturous sinner- "*To-day*, if ye will hear his voice, harden not your heart." The scriptures are full of warnings of the danger of being too late in the application for mercy. The virgins who had not oil in their vessels are represented as coming when the door is shut, and imploring admittance in vain. The compassion of God is represented as extending for a certain time, and then he will be no more intreated.

This may, at first sight, seem at variance with the many assurances we have, that his ears are *ever* open to the cry of the miser-

able; but a little consideration will reconcile the apparent discrepancy. For, not to speak of the sudden approach of death—and O! how often is it sudden, precluding thereby to the sinner any hope of repentance—we are to remember that repentance is God's gift. It is He, by the power of his Spirit, that works a better mind in the transgressor. His Spirit strives with men, by the means of grace, by the providential dispensations of life, by the display of the terrors of the law, by the exaltation of the mercies of the gospel. If God bestow not repentance, will any man say that he can have it? If the Spirit cease his strivings, will any man say that he shall become a new creature? Yet here is *practically* seen one of the most fearful

delusions of Satan. Persons imagine that they can, at any time, repent; and, therefore, there is now no need to take thought for judgment—a more "convenient season" will be found. But just as, if the heaven withhold the fructifying rain, the earth remains unfruitful; so if the benign and powerful influences of the Spirit on the human heart be not exerted, it continues hard and unimpressed. The man lives without God, he dies without preparation for eternity. It is not that he repents, and finds no place of pardon; it is not that he prays, and receives no answer to his prayer: but he never feels genuine godly sorrow for sin, he never really and properly desires those spiritual blessings, without which, no

man can see the kingdom of God. He is left alone: and he consoles himself, it may be, in his last hour, with some blind imagination, that as, upon the whole, his life was moral, he shall find acceptance; for the wicked, we are warned, have "no bands in their death*." To this state of confirmed indifference, the careless sinner is, naturally, always tending. It is the constitution of the human mind, to be less susceptible of impressions by the repetition of them. Things that once awakened powerful passions soon cease to move us. When familiar with danger, we disregard it; when accustomed to pleasure, it palls upon the sense. And so the denunciations of God's

* Psalm lxxiii. 4.

wrath against transgression, which once, perhaps, alarmed men, lose, by degrees, their terrors: the display of his boundless love, which once awakened some kind of emotion, is passed by unregarded: the awful realities of death, and judgment, and eternity, take, by repetition, less hold on the imagination: sin is less hideous, its consequences less feared. Hence the heart is continually hardening, the conscience continually searing, the means of grace becoming less likely to be effectual, the door of mercy continually shutting, till—in how many cases—it closes, and the sinner, "sunk in irremovable torpor, is never, never made to know the power and life of spiritual regeneration."

And thus the day of salvation *to you* is fast waning to its close: the accepted time is rapidly gliding past you. All the indisposition you feel to spiritual religion to-day, all, and more you will feel to-morrow: the force of evil habit will be strengthened, and Satan, like a cruel gaoler, more secure of his wretched prey, will gloat over the thickening chains which weigh you down. *Now*, then, is the time: now make the effort for liberty, or alas! it will be too late.

I know that God, in sovereign mercy, saves, even at the eleventh hour, some, to be to the praise of the glory of his eternal goodness; but you have no right to depend on any extraordinary manifestation of power and grace. If you live in light,

and yet shut your eyes against it; if you know that sin is evil, and yet will not forsake it; if you are told of the love of Christ, and yet refuse to apply to it—God, who works by moral means, will naturally leave you alone: it is no more than justice, that he should let you eat of the fruit of your ways, and be filled with your own devices.

Persons persuade themselves, they shall have time to repent upon a death-bed—when the body is racked with pain, when the mind, disordered with anxiety and agony, can scarcely collect its scattered thoughts, or concentrate for a moment its powers! To have to take the dreadful leap into eternity, with the consciousness that

all that ought to have been done is left undone, and all that ought to be left undone has been done! Even uncertainty at such a crisis, how awfully tremendous! I tremble to think how little a death-bed repentance is to be relied on. Far be it from me to pronounce on what is known to God only; but I seem, brethren, to have observed, that if, through life, religion has been habitually neglected — even though some serious thought appear afterwards awakened—a cloud *generally* hangs upon the bed of death; which, if it give the survivors any room to hope, leaves them, if they choose to think, a thousand times as much to fear. The day of grace is passing: the hour of acceptance is ready to close: now,

now, seize it, while it lasts; for NOW, and not hereafter, "is the accepted time, NOW is the day of salvation."

There are some important reflections, which naturally force themselves upon the mind from the whole subject.

I have shown you that there is reason to believe that we are now living in "the last days," "the last time." Then I say—

1. *It is a time for immediate repentance.* It is of little use to bewail the troubles, which, we may imagine, are coming on us, if we cherish those sins which have provoked them. Sin, if persisted in, is sure, sooner or later, to bring down punishment. But God does not delight in punishing. For when we read,

in scripture, of a judgment's being denounced against any nation, as often as that nation humbled itself before the Lord, he remitted, we are told, his anger. We ought, therefore, to set ourselves with anxious diligence to discover *why* God is laying his hand upon us. Joshua and the Israelites acted so, when their attack upon Ai had been unsuccessful. They perceived that the Lord was displeased with them, and they humbled themselves before him, and "Joshua rent his clothes, and fell to the earth upon his face before the ark of the Lord, until the eventide, he and the elders of Israel." And they sought out the accursed thing, and destroyed it from among them. And then the Lord was

intreated of them, and lifted up again his gracious countenance upon his people. We should, with as deep repentance, make as diligent inquisition for sin, to put it away from among us; we should cut off the right hand, and pluck out the right eye, which have caused us to offend. And therefore, I say, "repent: for the kingdom of heaven is at hand."

2. *It is a time for persevering prayer.* Our hope must be in God. And blessed be his name, "the effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much," not for his worthiness, but for the merit and intercession of Jesus Christ. Thus terrible judgments have been arrested. Abraham interceded for Sodom, and would have

been successful, could ten righteous men have been discovered therein: and to the supplication of Paul, when on his way a prisoner to Rome, were given, as we read, the lives of all the company that were voyaging with him. I believe it is through the prayers of Christian men, of those whom the world despises and ridicules, that judgments are frequently averted; thus, to the very persons they mock, are the wicked, under God, indebted for his long forbearance. What an argument for the Lord's people to be earnest in their prayers and supplications, to wrestle mightily with God, and not to let him go except he bless them!

3. *It is a time for resolute decision.*

He that sees a tempest coming, if he be wise, prepares for it. Even the Egyptian, when the plague of hail was at hand, "made his servants and his cattle flee into the houses." No man, when war was in the land, but would put himself upon his guard; and surely he that apprehends a season of trial should get him to "the rock that is higher" than he. Trouble is the time to prove the sincerity of faith. There are many, in whose heart the seed of the word springs up, and abideth for a time; but no sooner is the sun arisen with a burning heat, than it withereth, because it hath no root. It will be so in the judgments of the last days. Many, in that season of tribulation, will "make ship-

wreck of faith, and a good conscience." Therefore I say, brethren, it is not a time to temporise, not a time to waver betwixt God and mammon, not a time to meet the world half-way. Half-measures will not avail: "if the Lord be God," you must "serve him;" you must "come out" boldly, and the more, when you see others ready to break down the wall betwixt the ungodly and the church; you must "be separate and touch not the unclean thing," if ye would be the sons and daughters of the Lord Almighty.

4. Lastly, *It is a time for strenuous exertion in behalf of religion.* Let me ask, brethren, what you have done for God, who has done so great things for you?

What sacrifices of self have you ever made for the love of Christ, and to extend the honour of his name? Many talents have been entrusted to you, and the hour is at hand, when you shall be called to render an account of your stewardship. O what will be your confusion, if then you be found to have brought forth fruit only to yourselves! "Work then, while it is day," ere "the night cometh when no man can work." Be forward in every plan of mercy, in every thing which has the good, more especially the spiritual good, of your fellow-creatures for its object. By such means you will best promote your own welfare: for the prosperity of a country depends upon the honour that it pays to

God. "Righteousness exalteth a nation, but sin is a reproach to any people." The best, the only hope that we, in this land, can have of escaping the severity of the judgments which are coming on the earth, is, that we be "a holy nation." Then, and then only, shall we be found "a peculiar people."

I pray you, brethren, to "abound more and more; forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before."

THE END.

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